

Theme: John the Baptist was a messenger calling the people to the wilderness to be baptized in repentance for their sins, preparing for the coming of the King Who would usher in the Kingdom of God.

I. Intro - A Fast Start to the Story!

- A. The other gospels begin much more formally, slowly
- B. Matthew - genealogy; Luke - research; John - philosophical prologue
- C. Mark - title, and boom John the Baptist in the desert!
- D. This is a characteristic of Mark - fast-paced action!
- E. 42 of 59 NT occurrences of εὐθύς (immediately) in Mark
- F. Who is John? What was his ministry? How does this relate to the Gospel and the story of Jesus?

II. The Fulfillment of the Prophetic Promise & Hope

- A. The promise of the Gospel begins in the Old Testament
The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ² It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" — ³ "a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" Mark 1:1–3
 - 1. The beginning of the Gospel - OT quotes!
 - 2. The Gospel is not completely new but is built upon the story of God and humanity told in the OT
 - 3. The story of Jesus and the Gospel is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises and hopes!
 - 4. A quote from three books in the OT

See, I am sending an **angel** ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Exodus 23:20

- a. The word angel (in Hebrew and Greek) means "messenger"; it only means angel if specifically referring to angelic beings.
- b. In Exodus God sent His angel to go ahead of the people to lead them out of Egypt and into the promised land.
- c. The Gospel is the new exodus as God's people are delivered from slavery and death and brought into the Kingdom of God.

See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty. Malachi 3:1

- a. The word messenger is the same as in Exod. 23:20
- b. In Malachi God declares that a special messenger will come to Israel to prepare the way before the Lord.
- c. When the messenger comes, the Lord Himself, the Messenger of the Covenant, will come to His Temple.

A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Isaiah 40:3

- a. In Isaiah, a special voice cries out in the desert to prepare the way for the Lord Himself.
 - b. The way is prepared for God to come and deliver His people from exile (the theme of Isaiah 40-66)
5. These three texts had been combined by others before Mark to say that Elijah would come to prepare God's people.

6. Mark begins with the theme of God's promise to deliver His people through a new exodus.

Ex. 23:20 contains God's promise to send his messenger before the people on a first exodus through the wilderness to Canaan. In Isa. 40:3 the messenger announces the second exodus through the wilderness to the final deliverance prepared for God's people. In both the citation from the Law and from the Prophets the theme of an exodus through the wilderness is dominant and appropriate to Mark's conception and purpose. (Lane)

B. The Gospel according to - Isaiah!

The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ² It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" — ³ "a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" ⁴ And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Mark 1:1-4

1. Mark attributes the whole quote to Isaiah - why?
 - a. Citations in the ancient world do not follow our pattern - they did not have page numbers, editions, etc. They were often much more general
 - b. Isaiah is the largest and greatest of the prophetic books so it is given pride of place.
 - c. But there are also a couple of key verbal links with Isaiah
2. Isaiah specifically mentions the wilderness/desert
 - a. Exodus 23 is spoken to the people in the wilderness, but Isaiah is the one who specifically locates the messenger in the desert/wilderness
 - b. John will be ministering in the desert/wilderness (v4), so it makes sense to point people to Isaiah

- c. The desert/wilderness/quiet places (ἔρημος) will be a key theme in Mark's Gospel, and it begins here.

3. Isaiah is the prophet who focuses on the "Gospel"

- a. Isaiah mentions the Gospel 4x in chapters 40-66
- b. He proclaims the Good News that God will deliver His exile people, enacting a second great exodus.
- c. This new exodus will be done through the Servant of the Lord who will bear the sins of the people and save them.
- d. The Gospel is a key focus for Isaiah starting in chapter 40

You who bring **good tidings** to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring **good tidings** to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "**Here is your God!**" Isaiah 40:9

1. The voice in the wilderness points to the Gospel
2. The voice in the wilderness proclaims that God Himself has come!

4. John is the fulfillment of the OT prophecies that a messenger would come to prepare the way for the coming of God to deliver and save His people. He would declare "The King is Coming!"

III. The Ministry of the Messenger - John the Baptist

A. John was a man of the wilderness (ἔρημος)

And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins... ⁶ John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. Mark 1:4, 6

1. John did his whole ministry in the desert/wilderness/quiet place (ἔρημος)

2. He dressed like a man of the wilderness (v6)
3. His attire was also like Elijah - who the people thought would come before the Messiah
4. He ate and acted like a man of the wilderness, not of the refined cities and the priests.

B. John called the people to repent and return to the LORD

And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.
Mark 1:4–5

1. John calls the people to repent - they are not right with the Lord, even though they are physical Jews.
2. John requires the people to be baptized to show their repentance from their sins
 - a. People had heard calls for Jews to repent before
 - b. Baptism had been around for a while - for Gentiles who were converting to Judaism!
 - c. But John is requiring Jews to repent and be baptized
 - d. This is so new and unexpected that John became known as “The Baptizer”
3. John requires the people to come back out to the desert/wilderness (ἐρημος)
 - a. Israel had gone through the wilderness to get into the promised land
 - b. The people had returned from the exile through the wilderness - and they thought their presence back in the land with the Temple showed they were right with God.

- c. John is calling them back out to the wilderness, to come out and repent, to acknowledge they have not known God.

C. John points to the One coming after Him

And this was his message: “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Mark 1:7–8

1. John did not point to himself but to another (Jesus)
2. This One may come after John but He is far greater
 - a. He is more powerful than John
 - b. John is not even worthy to be His slave
 - c. John baptizes with water, but He will baptize with the Holy Spirit
 1. The longed-for Messianic age of the new covenant was to be the age of the Spirit
 2. The coming King would not only be anointed with the Spirit; He would also give the Spirit to His people

For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. Isaiah 44:3 (also see Isaiah 32:15; 63:11, 14)

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Ezekiel 36:25–27

D. John the Baptist was a messenger calling the people to the wilderness to be baptized in repentance for their sins, preparing for the coming of the King Who would usher in the Kingdom of God.

IV. Applying the Word

A. Do I hear the call to repentance and confession?

1. Many Jews thought they were automatically 'in'
2. Many Americans think the same thing today!
3. But we enter the kingdom through repentance and confession - not by birth, nationality, or our works!
4. The call today is the same - come out of our comfort to the wilderness to repent, confess our sins, and look to God for mercy.
5. Have you ever done this personally? If not, do so today! Repent, confess, be baptized!

B. Do I hear the call to repentance and confession?

1. I did not stutter - this also applies to believers!
2. As Luther said, the whole Christian life is one of repentance.
3. As believers, God still calls to us to let the Spirit search our hearts, repent and confess our sins.
4. Is there some area the Spirit is speaking to me today?
 - a. Is there a specific sin I have been embracing?
 - b. Do I find my heart dull to the things of God?
 - c. Have I simply been on autopilot in my walk?
 - d. As we come to the Table, let the Spirit do His work!

C. A Table in the Wilderness

They spoke against God, saying, "Can God spread a table in the wilderness? ²⁰ He struck the rock so that water gushed out and streams overflowed. Can he also give bread or provide meat for his people?" Psalm 78:19–20

1. We looked at this story recently!
2. Israel doubted God could spread a Table in the wilderness even though God had brought water from the Rock for them.
3. We know that because the Rock - Christ - was struck - God spreads a Table and gives us food and drink in the wilderness.
4. As we come to the wilderness to let the Spirit search us, to repent and confess - the Lord meets us, feeds us, strengthens us, and pours out His grace and Spirit upon us.
5. Come to the Table spread for you!

The Messenger of the King

Mark 1:1-8

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Communion

Deuteronomy 1:11

Teaching keywords: Biblical characters; prophecy (Old Testament); confession and repentance; new covenant

May the Lord, the God of your fathers, increase you a thousand times and bless you as he has promised! Deuteronomy 1:11

The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ² It is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way” — ³ “a voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’” ⁴ And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶ John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And this was his message: “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” Mark 1:1–8